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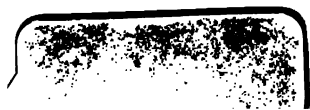
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PHŒBE:

OR

Rude Time the living Roses blights.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

By SARAH GWENT.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."—*Isaiah, xlii. a.*

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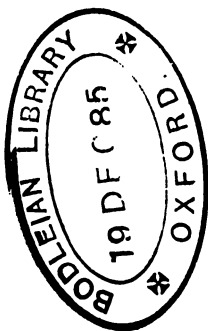
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P H Œ B E.



CHAPTER I.

“O little child, O darling child,
I see thee eager at thy play ;
Now shouting to the apples on the tree,
With cheeks as round and red as they ;
And now among the yellow stalks,
Among the flowering shrubs and plants,
As restless as a bee.”—*Longfellow.*

“The grace of heaven,
Before, behind thee, and on every hand,
Enwheel thee round.”—*Shakespeare.*

EARLY summer was “stealing on
spring’s sweet’ prime,” the day
was one of peerless beauty, un-
surpassed even under Italian skies ; the

air was fragrant with the breath of flowers, and filled with the warbling of birds, the cooing of doves, and the humming of bees; silvery clouds were sleeping in the deep blue sky, and the trees and shrubs seemed to vie with each other in putting forth their "brightest, tenderest green."

A fair-haired, blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked child, of about four years old, was playing in the garden of a cottage situated in the picturesque village of H—in Devonshire, and above which towered a magnificent chestnut-tree with its pyramids of pink and white flowers, through whose roseate drifts a wreath of blue smoke was curling up from the chimney of the cottage.

The child had for some time been wheeling her little carriage along the garden walks, singing to the music of her own footsteps, and the sound of her merry voice was as sweet as the song of the lark that carolled up in the crystalline blue.

Phœbe—or *shining, pure*—was her name; she was a flower among the flowers, a "bud of life folded in leaves and love,"

and she presented a charming picture of childish innocence and happiness.

And so thought the fond young mother, as she sat at the cottage door, working diligently, and looking up now and then at her darling child, who was the sunshine of her home.

John and Mary Slater, the parents of Phœbe, were good, honest, industrious people, and had lived in that cottage since their marriage some six years before my story begins.

John was a clever gardener, and worked at the Rectory, which was about a mile distant from his home.

In his leisure hours he read much, and cultivated flowers in his own small garden, and brought some of them to rare perfection.

Mary was a Honiton lace-maker, and in the long summer days was to be seen sitting at the cottage door, with her pillow before her, working industriously at her beautiful lace.

She loved her work very much, and

intended bringing up her little daughter to the same occupation, for the sake of the gentle mother whom she had lost long since, and whose memory she fondly cherished as the most sacred treasure of her heart.

And as on that sunny June day Mary's fingers moved rapidly among the innumerable pins, she silently prayed for strength to follow the path of duty, whence alone can come happiness and peace;—prayed to be made watchful against all temptations, strong in faith, fervent in prayer;—prayed earnestly that a blessing might rest upon her little child, that God would guard and guide her always. That, when the sunlight of happiness glowed around her, she might feel God's goodness; and, when clouds gathered around, she might still discern His presence and love in the darkest night.

And when the little child, with half-closed eyes, smiled as she softly sank to sleep that night, a sense of peace and calm arose within the mother's heart.

“Light dwell in thee, and thou
Dwell ever in the light ;
No wrinkle on thy brow,
Thine eye still blue and bright.

Peace be thy gentle guest,
Peace holy and divine ;
God's blessed sunlight still
Upon thy pathway shine.

His Spirit fill thy soul,
And cast out every sin ;
His own deep joy impart,
And make a heaven within.”



CHAPTER II.

“A child no longer, but a maiden now,
A thoughtful maiden with a gentle brow,
A cheek tinged lightly, and a dove-like eye,
And all hearts bless her as she passes by.”

“Trip along, bright feet of May,
Trip along from day to day,
Trip along in sun and showers,
Trip along to wake the flowers,
Trip along the breezy hills,
Trip beside the prattling rills.
Trip away, all fresh and gay,
Trip away, bright feet of May.”

Dr. Horatius Bonar.

THE fifth of May dawned brightly,
not a cloud sullied the empyreal
arch, which was almost as blue as
lapis-lazuli. The breath of the hawthorn
perfumed the air; dewdrops rested with
the pure lustre of pearls upon the flowers,

and all nature rejoiced in the revivifying refulgence of the orb of day.

It was Sunday morning, and the anniversary of Phœbe's seventeenth birthday. From the gay, prattling child, she had grown into a thoughtful, quiet girl, with gentle, modest ways, and a kind word for every one.

Her parents' moral teaching of her had been very simple, and based chiefly upon one great text, "Fear God and do the right," and they had endeavoured to make her brave, truthful, and kind, pure as crystal in thought, and word, and deed.

Her pious mother had led her daughter into the quiet and deep recesses of her own faith, and with cheerful look, loving voice, and gentle guidance, made her familiar with the thoughts of One who was ever near, the Giver of every mercy—One who hated the false and loved the true, and was ever ready to bless and strengthen those who wished and tried to follow His steps.

Her father, too, knew how to lead her

thoughts "from Nature up to Nature's God," and taught her to see, in the flowers she loved so well, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God.

Brought up under the care of such wise and tender parents, it was no wonder that Phœbe grew up among the flowers, fresh as the rose, pure as the lily, and modest as the violet.

Very fresh and fair and pure she looked on that Sabbath morning, as she walked with her parents down the long village street to the church, and crossed the holy threshold into God's more immediate presence, there to enjoy a nearer view of heaven; into the "courts of the Lord," where He has promised to hear the supplications of his worshippers, and to bestow a blessing upon them.

The bells ceased "sprinkling with holy sounds the air," and then the soft, low tones of the organ were heard creeping along through the spacious aisles. The melody was scarcely distinct at first, all that could be heard was the faint sound

drifting hither and thither, sometimes louder and then sinking into a murmur scarcely above the flutter of the ivy leaves around the orient window.

Phœbe loved music, and her face showed how moved she was by the sweet, elevating sounds that stole on her ear,—how fully she realised the holiness, the blessedness of the Sabbath.

Every true Christian loves the sacred day, the connecting link between earth and heaven, and its religious observances are the very life of the soul,—its spirit, its breath, its sustenance.

A deeper and sweeter beauty seems to clothe the fields on the Sabbath; the toil of the poor has ceased for the day, and while the wearied body is enjoying sweet repose the spirit soars on the wings of holy meditation into that presence in which it hopes eternally to dwell. The body and mind being thus disengaged from the darkness of care, how delightful it is to stand before the throne of heaven, glorifying the All-Supreme, the All-sustaining God.

And, although circumstances may forbid any more costly offering, the devout Christian at least bears to the throne of grace the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the unfeigned homage of the lips, and the grateful tribute of the heart :—

“For thee we long and pray,
O blessed Sabbath morn !
Day of glad rest,
Of days the best,
Sweet Sabbath day !”



CHAPTER III.

“Earth’s joys are but a dream ; its fairest form
Sunshine and shadow mixed ; its brightest day
A rainbow braided on the wreaths of storm.”

Dr. Horatius Bonar.

“We know such hours, when, after days of pain,
And nights where sleep was not,
God gives us ease, and peace, and calm again,
Till, all the past forgot,
We say, in rest and thankfulness most deep,
‘E’en so He giveth His beloved sleep.’”

Lucy Fletcher.

NOW true it is that the greatest earthly happiness is but a dream, that to the most happy and delightful scenes often succeed the most trying and sad. A dense darkness gathers over the garden of our souls, a keen north wind sweeps over it, the leaves close up

and the flowers have no longer any sunlight within their folded petals.

Yet there is a Providence, a Father tender of His children, a God infinitely wise; and, as we become convinced that He who governs all things with unerring goodness and power operates only for our happiness, we shall confide in Him with certainty, and repose upon His parental regard with joyful and heart-felt gladness.

A few weeks after her seventeenth birthday Phœbe was attacked with fever, and was dangerously ill for some time.

That was an anxious season for her affectionate parents, but it was mitigated by the cheering influence of hope, and they knew that God would spare them from suffering more than they could bear, that His all-powerful and paternal hand protected them, and that He would hear the prayers of the afflicted and distressed when uttered in the language of faith and purity of heart. They poured forth their supplications to Him, prayed that their dear daughter might be spared to them,

and their prayers were answered, and she who was the music of their home was restored to health and strength—restored to be a comfort and a blessing to them in days of weariness and gloom.

The whole aspect of Nature had, however, undergone a change ere Phœbe was able to resume her customary home duties. The rich and unvarying green of the corn-fields had changed to a still richer gold-colour, and there seemed to be an air of divinity breathing around every object.

There are some days in the lovely month of August so perfect in their character of beauty that they seem almost to be revelations of a higher existence. Everywhere is joy, everywhere is beauty ; it reigns on the hills and in the valleys, on the trees and in the groves.

It is impossible to pass through even one such day without having many deep and animating impressions awakened by it ;—without having the thoughts elevated to that wonderful Power, that all-pervading Presence, unseen yet felt, that is like the

enfolding of the everlasting arms. Such a day was it when Phœbe returned home from the little village of Llanwithiel, situated on the wild coast of Cornwall, after having spent five weeks there with her aunt, and having been restored to excellent health and radiant spirits.

The cottage became fragrant with happiness again when Phœbe's low, gentle voice was heard reading fragments from the Book of God's Word, the Word of Life.

As I have already said, John and Mary Slater were good, pious people, and it was their custom to consecrate the first and best hours of the morning, and the last of declining eve, to prayer and to the study of the Holy Bible. And blest indeed is that home where the voice of prayer ascends like sweet incense to the throne of the God of each day and night.

“Blest be that tranquil hour of morn, -
And blest that hour of solemn eve,
When, on the wings of prayer upborne,
The world I leave.

For then a day-spring shines on me,
Brighter than morn's ethereal glow ;
And richer dews descend from Thee
Than earth can know.

No words can tell what blest relief
There for my every want I find ;
What strength for warfare, balm for grief,
What peace of mind.

Lord, till I reach yon blissful shore,
No privilege so dear shall be
As thus my inmost soul to pour
In prayer to Thee."



CHAPTER IV.

“ The cherish’d fields
Put on their winter robe of purest white.
'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head ; and, ere the languid sun,
Faint from the west, emits his evening ray,
Earth’s universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man.”—*Thomson.*

“ That season comes wherein our
Saviour’s birth is celebrated.”—*Shakespeare.*

ABOUT half a mile from John Slater’s cottage was situated Firley Hall, the seat of Sir Edgar and Lady Thornton.

It was a handsome mansion, built on the side of a tree-crested hill, commanding an extensive and undulating prospect, with the sea in the distance gleaming with

every conceivable hue, purple and gold predominating, but blending in such fine and exquisite degrees, that it was difficult to say where one ended and the other began.

It was a Christmas Eve; the snow lay white and soft on the ground, for it was a Christmas of the old-fashioned kind—not warm with a drizzling rain and a westerly wind—and those to whom Heaven had given that “king’s dower,” a poet’s soul, rejoiced in the cold beauty of that Christmas Eve.

The moon shone in the crystal sky; the golden stars glittered there; the moonbeams fell upon the fair world, silvering the trees, gleaming on the icicles, and throwing weird shadows on the ground; and the chimes of the bells were borne hither and thither on the clear air.

Within Firley Hall all was warmth and brightness. Sir Edgar and Lady Thornton were entertaining company, and the sounds of music and singing floated out on the frosty air.

Lady Thornton and her two daughters, Maud and Lucy, had that day visited several of the cottages in the village, and amongst them John Slater's tranquil dwelling, and had left behind them very substantial manifestations of their bounty.

Lucy was a sweet, gentle girl, and completed her twenty-first year on Christmas Day. She was always ready to sacrifice herself for others, and would not give pain to even the meanest thing that breathed. She abhorred cruelty in all its forms, and felt so strongly on the subject of the chase, and pleaded so eloquently for the innocent and defenceless animals, that her father had given up hunting and would no longer conspire in inflicting so much unnecessary suffering on the helpless and confiding creatures of the earth. "*Le plus beau don de l'homme, c'est la miséricorde,*" and the destruction of life for mere destruction's sake has never been, and cannot be, a source of pleasure to any human being.

It may be admitted that man may require

to take away life in self-defence, but such cases are rare, and but for his destruction of the natural balance between the various races of the lower creation he would seldom need to interfere.

Love should not be limited to the human race alone, but extend to every sentient creature, and "Thou shalt not kill nor destroy in all my holy mountains" should be deeply impressed on every heart. What true and tender heart would not be awakened to pitiful reflection on reading Thomson's touching words :—

"The stag, too, singled from the herd, where long
He ranged the branching monarch of the shades,
Before the tempest drives. At first, in speed
He, sprightly, puts his faith; and, roused by fear,
Gives all his swift ærial soul to flight;
He bursts the thickets, glances through the glades,
And plunges deep into the wildest wood.
Oft in the full-descending flood he tries
To lose the scent and lave his burning sides;
Oft seeks the herd; the watchful herd, alarm'd,
With selfish care avoid a brother's woe.
What shall he do? His once so vivid nerves,
So full of buoyant spirit, now no more
Inspire the course; but fainting breathless toil,

Sick, seizes on his heart ; he stands at bay,
And puts his last, weak refuge in despair.
The big round tears run down his dappled face ;
He groans in anguish ; while the growling pack,
Blood-happy, hang at his fair jutting chest,
And mark his beauteous chequer'd sides with gore."

Oh, what a spectacle of woe that scene presents ! Alas, that man, "the noblest work of God," should inflict such indescribable pangs on the beings of the lower creation ! Will he never love mercy, and teach his sons to love it too ?

"Mercy to him that shows it is the rule
And righteous limitation of its act,
By which Heaven moves in pardoning guilty man ;
And he that shows none, being ripe in years,
And conscious of the outrage he commits,
Shall seek it and not find it in his turn.

Distinguish'd much by reason and, still more,
By our capacity of grace divine,
From creatures that exist but for our sake,
Which, having served us, perish, we are held
Accountable ; and God, some future day,
Will reckon with us roundly for the abuse
Of what He deems no mean or trivial trust."



CHAPTER V.

“Trust not that earth again,
Verdant and fair ;
Trust not its fields again,
Winter is there.

Trust not its love again,
Sparkling and fair ;
Trust not its joys again,
Sorrow is there.”

Dr. Horatius Bonar.

THE winter of 18— was unusually rigorous, and there was a great deal of suffering amongst the poor of the village, although loving hearts and gentle hands were not wanting to minister to them.


About the middle of January John Slater caught a severe cold, which developed into congestion of the lungs, and he was confined to the house for many weeks.

He and his good wife had saved a little money, which enabled them to meet the emergency, and John was surrounded with all that love and tender solicitude could suggest.

After several weeks of painful suffering, patiently and cheerfully borne, he began to regain strength, and when the weather became warmer he was able to resume his work at the rectory.

May came in with the strangely bright and sultry weather of that year, and John was frequently very exhausted at his work, and by the troublesome cough which still continued.

Summer faded into Autumn's mellow fruitfulness ; delicious apples, whose golden brilliancy was heightened by the rich lines of purple, weighed down the mossed cottage trees ; luscious pears and plums, downy peaches and fragrant nectarines, whose juice was sweeter than honey, displayed their beauties on the sunny walls, the yellow stacks filled the barnyards, silver mists marked the river's course, rosy sunsets flushed the



hills, and the leaves were crisp and rustling on the pathways; gossamer films, spangled with dewdrops, embroidered every wild-rose stem and bramble bush, and no sound was heard save the chirp of a solitary bird, or the rustle of an over-ripe chestnut that fell through the thinning branches to the sear leaves below.

Winter set in with "storms, and clouds, and vapours," and nature appeared bleak, wild, and desolate.

John Slater's cough became more and more troublesome, and a keen observer would have noticed that he was thinner, that his cheeks were hollow and more brightly crimson, that the expression of his eye was peculiarly hard and brilliant, and it would not have been difficult to understand what those symptoms prognosticated.

It would be a mournful task to trace his life through the few short months that remained,—months of weariness and pain borne with the exemplary courage and resignation of a true Christian.

He knew well the nature and danger

of his disease, and in the midst of midnight darkness, when sleep forsook him and suffering caused him to number the melancholy hours, he consoled himself with the reflection that he was advancing towards the heavenly kingdom, the happy region where night does not exist, where there is no more sickness, distress, or sorrow, where "life is one glad day," and where

"Work never can bring weariness,
For work itself is love."

And ere another spring smiled upon the earth John Slater had passed over to his rest—"The rest of God."

"From this bleak hill of storm,
To yon, warm sunny height,
Where love for ever shines."



CHAPTER VI.

“One sorrow never comes but brings an heir
That may succeed as his inheritor.—*Shakespeare.*”

“Be still, my soul ; Jehovah loveth thee ;
Fret not nor murmur at thy weary lot ;
Though dark and lone thy journey seems to be,
Be sure that thou art ne’er by Him forgot.
He ever loves ; then trust Him, trust Him still ;
Let all thy care be this—the doing of His will.”
Dr. Horatius Bonar.

FIVE years passed away ; “five summers, with the length of five long winters,” had passed by since that wave of trouble rolled over Phœbe and her mother,—since attending angels bore John Slater to his heavenly home, where Jesus leads the redeemed in tranquil, dewy meads, beside the Fount of Life, and where all is unbroken rest—rest for the aching

frame and for the thought-worn brow,—where all is health and gladness, light and joy.

Five years of bitter heart-ache and loneliness for the bereaved ones, but they were also years of patient endurance and brave effort, of trusting submission to the holy will of Him who ordereth all things well, who loves His children, and comforts and supports them in all their trials; and whose victorious arm is stretched forth to assist them in all their difficulties.

About two years after John's death, Mary became blind, an affliction probably caused by her occupation, for lace-making is eminently injurious to the sight.

This was a sore trial to her—greater than any one imagined.

Only God knew the sadness of her heart, for she did not murmur; she was not one to speak largely of her feelings, she suffered and made no sign.

“Though the stream of being floweth
Calmly to the sea of peace,

Though the weary pilgrim goeth
To his home of sleep and ease—
None, but he who suffers, knoweth
All a spirit's bitterness."

The gentle Phœbe was ever loving and hopeful; she knew that she must work for her afflicted mother and herself, and she therefore tested her ability to the full, and resolved to do all that it was capable of effecting.

She persevered, prayed, and worked diligently day by day, from morning till night, exerting the utmost of her power that she might accomplish all she desired, and her efforts were crowned with success.

Lady Thornton was a friend in need, and frequently found time to visit Phœbe and her mother, and administered what was better than money—though *that*, when needed, was not withheld — words of counsel and encouragement.

The "law of kindness" was the law of Lady Thornton's life, and ruled in her soul with the precision of an instinct and the force of necessity. She was charitable

and humane, and "she stretcheth forth her hand to the poor; yea, she stretcheth forth her hand to the needy," might truly have been said of her. She had strength, vigour, and decision, and was, moreover, gentle and gracious in speech, amiable and winning in manners; her voice was low and sweet, not loud and ostentatious. There was "grace in her steps, and dignity in her gestures," and the "calm, soft heaven in her eye."

Lady Thornton was very elegant and brilliantly intellectual, and was, moreover, far from thinking that it is the privilege of a woman to be weak and helpless; to be incapable of doing anything for herself; or to be always ill. She did not fancy it necessary to be always delicate and fragile; to be upheld, and sheltered, and indulged as if it were an evil to set foot to the ground or face to the weather. She knew that life was given for something higher and nobler than an everlasting appeal to tenderness and compassion.

Lucy was like her mother in person and

general outline of character ; her refined countenance told plainly of the sweet and gentle, yet self-reliant nature, which won the love and esteem of all who knew her.

Maud was widely different from Lucy in every respect, notwithstanding equal advantages, and although their minds had been moulded on the same principles of education. Her face expressed somewhat of pride and selfishness, and decided originality of character. Her standard of goodness was a high one, and, in order to attain it, she endeavoured to struggle against those infirmities of human nature which ever war with holier principles. But she had yet to learn what an indescribable joy there is in laying aside all thought of self and living for others ; had yet to learn that true religion is of a practical character ; that it consists not in mere forms and ceremonies—although these are not to be despised or neglected, but observed regularly and punctually—not in gestures and professions calculated to be seen or heard, but in pious thoughts and holy actions ; in


succouring the distressed ; in visiting the fatherless and the widow in their affliction, and not in *visiting* them only, but advising, consoling, encouraging, and praying with them, and giving them whatever can be spared from what God has given us.

It is not safe to walk the treacherous road of self-pleasing and indolent indulgence, to disregard the feelings of others. It brings a large harvest of aching hearts and inexpressible sorrow and sadness, and crushes the sweetest flowers on the pathway of life.

“ ’Tis by defeat we conquer,
Grow rich by growing poor ;
And from our largest givings
We draw our fullest store.

’Tis thus we rise by setting,
Thro’ darkness reach our day ;
Our own ways hourly losing,
To find the eternal way.

Then let the blossoms perish,
And let the fragrance go ;
All the surer and the larger
Is the harvest we shall know.”





CHAPTER VII.

“ Past all pain for ever,
Done with sickness now,
Let me close thine eyes, mother,
Let me smooth thy brow.
Rest, and health, and gladness,
These thy portion now ;
Let me press thy hand, mother,
Let me kiss thy brow.

Rest without broken dreams,
Or wakeful fears,
Or hidden tears,—
That shall be thine !
All well with thee ;
Oh, would that it were mine ! ”

Dr. Horatius Bonar.

THE delightful days of summer had departed ; the whole face of nature was changed ; the rays of the sun fell cheerlessly through the gloomy clouds

upon gardens divested of their flowers, upon fields and hills whose charms were withered, and whose aspect was melancholy and dull.

The soft melody of the birds no longer floated on the air, and the loquacity of the insects had been chilled by cold winds and nights.

And oh ! how cold and chill were the thoughts that pierced Phœbe's heart as she sat beside her mother's bed and saw the dear life ebbing away.

Clouds had gathered and overspread the landscape of her existence, and she felt her spirit burdened with a gloom and despair that could not be dispelled.

Her mother had been ill for more than two years; and a few months after Phœbe's marriage she had become unable to leave her room or her bed, and now it was only too evident that the end was drawing near ; the golden bowl was breaking ; the silver cord was fast being loosed ; the body and soul—companions for sixty-one years—were being sundered.

The weeping Phœbe bent over her beloved mother and prayed, and laid her ear to the dear lips to catch the last, faint words, and as the stars faded before the orient day the spirit passed away to its rest—its everlasting joy.

Phœbe and her husband had lived about three years at the cottage after their bereavement, when circumstances rendered it necessary to remove to Exeter.

Phœbe found it hard to leave the old home—the dear home of her childhood, around which were twined so many sacred memories.

But work had failed, and her good husband thought that he could succeed better at Exeter, where he had obtained employment at a manufactory in the lower part of the city, near the river.

Accordingly one grey, autumnal morning, Phœbe bade farewell—a *silent* farewell, for “Nothing speaks our grief so well as to speak nothing,” to the pretty cottage with its charming garden, rich in luscious fruits, and to the quiet village where she

had lived for more than thirty years—
years chequered with

“ Bits of gladness and of sorrow,
Strangely cross'd and interlaid ;
Now the garland, now the coffin,
Now the wedding, now the tomb,
Now the song above the living,
Now the chaunt above the dead ;
The smooth smile of infant beauty,
Age's wan and furrow'd head.”

William Lethbridge, Phœbe's husband, had taken a house on the Old Tiverton Road, at Exeter, pleasant and sunny, and commanding a view of the distant landscape, but with nothing of the picturesque beauty of the cottage at H——.

The garden was a wilderness, but William soon set it in order, and by the following summer it presented a very attractive and smiling appearance.

Phœbe had an especial love for lilies—those sweet emblems of purity and innocence—and great was her delight when, one beautiful morning which succeeded a two days' rain, she went into the garden and found the first snowy blossoms in

bloom, diffusing their fragrance on the warm air. She gathered a few of them and took them in to her little daughter, who was an invalid, and just then very ill. The winter had been severe, and had tried the fragile flower. Her small, pale face lighted up with pleasure when she saw the lilies, and she extended her little thin hands towards them with an exclamation of delight.

Flowers were the sunshine of her life ; she loved to caress them, to gaze upon their exquisite, tender beauty, and inhale their fragrant breath.

Summer came with its balmy air, green grass and woodland glories, and the little invalid was wheeled out into the garden, where she spent several hours every day. She loved to hear the joyous singing of the birds, to watch the rooks carèering overhead, and a faint colour came to the thin cheeks, and the light to her languid eyes, and the anxious parents fondly hoped that her health would be restored.

But, alas ! she was suddenly attacked

with malignant sore throat, and, being too delicate to struggle with the disease, she passed from our transient summer, to that which has no end, her little fingers playing to the last with the flowers she loved so well.

The grief of the parents was deeper than words can express ; it was hard to say " Thy will be done," but they knew that they should find their child again

" In the fields of light above."

The Vicar of the parish in which they lived called to see them, and consoled them with words of comfort and sympathy, which fell like balm upon their sorrowing hearts. He was a very good, kind man, and was greatly beloved by all who knew him. He was also a very popular preacher, and charmed his hearers with the eloquence of his earnest appeals, and, if there was one lesson more than all others which he taught his people most earnestly, it was the importance of not sacrificing principle to policy, of not for-

saking the straight line of duty for the by-paths of expediency, of not turning aside from the purposes which they had prayerfully and intelligently formed, either by the opposition of enemies or the alienation of friends. He exhorted them not to prove traitors to their better selves,—not to be prevented by pride, and independence of character, from taking the first step on the narrow way that leads unto life,—a step which consists in a total renunciation of every claim of human merit, and in a firm reliance on the satisfaction of the Cross. And, above all, he entreated them to pray earnestly for the assisting grace of God's Holy Spirit, that their will and their deeds might correspond, and that their Christian desires might ever be productive of godly actions,—that they might ever feel more, and yet more, that it would be infinitely better to die doing right, than to live doing wrong,—better that the universe should conspire to overwhelm them, than that they should be compelled to wander through the countless ages of Eternity.

seeking rest in vain from the Hades in their own hearts.

May we ever follow the path of duty,—
be true to the right as the eagle to his aim,
and we shall ever enjoy the calm which
inevitably flows from the testimony of an
approving conscience.

“Curved is the line of Beauty,
Straight the line of Duty,
Walk in the last and thou shalt see
The other ever follow thee.”



CHAPTER VIII.

“Gone to begin a new and happier story,
Thy bitterer tale of earth now told and done ;
These outer shadows for that inner glory
Exchanged for ever. Oh, thrice blessed one !
Just gone within the veil, where I shall follow,
Not far before me, hardly out of sight,—
I down beneath thee in this cloudy hollow,
And thou above me on yon sunny height.”

Dr. Horatius Bonar.

FIFTEEN summers passed on, with
their blue skies, green leaves, mel-
liferous flowers and singing birds ;
and through them all Phœbe proved her-
self a heroine in the battle of life.

The obscurity of her position did not pre-
vent her from being a heroine—from having
a heart tender, and strong, and true, a mind
pure and exalted, and feelings fresher than
dew-laden flowers, and deeper than seas.

She performed well each day's duty, bore bravely each day's conflict. And, above all, she lived in prayer and faith and love towards God, and He had sustained her in her time of need. Many changes came, joys passed away, the sweet became bitter, and the bright became dark.

The summer of 18— was intensely hot, and there were many cases of fever amongst the poor who lived in the lower and more crowded parts of the city. Three of Phœbe's children were attacked with fever, and in one week passed away. And ere another week had elapsed Death spread his wings again and bore to Paradise the little one nestling in her arms, her worshipped star, her flowret in the wild, whose tender form she fondly clasped, and whose parting left another dark and silent place by the once-joyous hearth.

Nor was this all, for, ere the winter's snows mantled the earth in dazzling purity, He who afflicteth but in love saw fit to remove Phœbe's earthly support, and she was left alone—yet not alone, for she had

One near her, nearer and nearer as the years rolled on—alone to fight the battle of life. Her husband's health had for some time caused her much anxiety and sorrow. A time came when he found the walk from the Old Tiverton Road to the manufactory at which he worked too much for his failing strength ; so he and his family were obliged to remove to another part of the city, into a close, thickly-populated street, into the smoke, the din, and the bustle, and much they missed the glad breezes that had come to them laden with the freshness of the sea and the open country.

William struggled on for some time, but a day came when his strength failed altogether, and he had a foreboding that his end was drawing near. And his foreboding was only too true. Scarcely three weeks yet remained. His illness increased rapidly, and his weakness was extreme. One morning, which succeeded a night of great weariness and pain, William, feeling that he was nearing the celestial city, told

Phœbe, in a voice quivering with tenderness and emotion, that ere long he must bid farewell to her and the dear children, and leave them to face the difficulties of life alone.

Oh, what a chill these words struck to Phœbe's heart, and how almost impossible she found it to maintain a semblance of calmness! She gently laid her trembling hand upon her husband's brow, and with a fainting heart and a voice tender with affection's deepest music she essayed to comfort him with soft-breathing words of strength, and hope, and courage. Then kneeling down, she prayed to Him, the all-pitying One, to look upon them through the o'er-shadowing cloud of sorrow, and hear and save.

The day wore on. William's weakness and other distressing symptoms increased and nothing that was done gave him relief, and the physician said that he could not live many more hours. Night came with myriads of stars, and cast her dewy veil over the earth, and William grew rapidly worse.

Phœbe sat beside him, and endeavoured to read, according to his request, some precious passages from the sacred page of "Heaven's recorded love."

The Vicar came and administered the sacrament to him, and soothed him with words of holy consolation.

The weary sufferer remained for some time in a state of calm meditation and spoke but little. The hope of eternal life illuminated his pale features with celestial happiness. Suddenly a change swept across his countenance, and he looked up into his wife's face with a smile, and said he was *so* glad that he should be buried in the old cemetery (the new one had not been opened, but would be in a few weeks) with the dear ones whom Jesus had taken to bloom in the "fields of light above." He called his children to him; they and their mother knelt beside him, and hot tears ran down every cheek, and every lip trembled with anguish unspeakable. He said Good-bye to them all, and told them not to grieve too bitterly because he was

going to leave them ; they had a kind and tender Father in heaven, who would watch over them and guide them in all their ways, and who would never leave them nor forsake them. The same beneficent Being would supply all their needs, and from the unknown depths of the future no trouble would come upon them unaccompanied by its appropriate comfort.

Gradually his voice grew fainter and fainter until it was only a whisper, then his eyes closed, and he seemed to sink into a deep, calm sleep, from which he never awoke on earth. No more toil and fatigue, no more distress, no more anxiety, no more sorrow now, and so he lay for a long time. The breathing became gradually fainter and slower, and sometimes only a sigh—until, at last, there was no sound or motion. The spirit had gone to God who gave it,—gone where all things that are lovely meet, and all things that are pure.

“Where every sever’d wreath is bound,
Where none have heard the knell
That smites the heart with that deep sound,—
Farewell, beloved ! farewell !”



CHAPTER IX.

“ From the moist meadow to the wither'd hill,
Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs,
And swells, and deepens, to the cherish'd eye.
The hawthorn whitens, and the juicy groves
Put forth their buds, unfolding by degrees,
Till the whole leafy forest stands display'd
In full luxuriance.”—*Thomson*.

“ May, sweet May, again is come,
May that frees the land from gloom ;
On the laughing hedgerow's side
She hath spread her treasures wide ;
She is in the greenwood shade,
Where the nightingale hath made
Every branch and every tree
Ring with her sweet melody.”


NOT far from Firley Hall stood a little cottage ; it was very small, but had an air of health and peace. Around it was a garden in

which were fruits in abundance, and flowers, and herbs, and heath from the breezy, thyme-scented moors. There were also two large bee-hives whence came a music like the pleasant sound of lulling waters. Around the porch hung a honeysuckle, shedding its fragrance on the balmy air; and the small diamond-paned windows were sparkling through their lovely screen of roses and clematis; and the roof was vocal with the twittering of the swallows, whose nests were built under the moss-grown thatch.

It was dewy eventide.

At the window of the cottage sat a woman in widow's garb; her face was thin, pale, and grief-worn, but there was a sweet, dove-like look in her blue eyes, and the stamp of a pure and noble mind was upon her brow.

A large old Bible lay upon the table beside her, and around which sat three children—two boys and one girl—with bright eyes and faces lighted up with health and contentment.



The cottage was Phœbe's home ; it was she who sat at the window, and the children were hers.

Phœbe had been placed in the cottage by the kind and generous Lady Thornton, and her eldest son, John, who was fifteen when his father died, had been engaged to help the gardeners at the Hall.

Very thankful was the desolate widow to leave the stifling street in the crowded city, to return to her native village which she loved so well,—to trace again the steps of infancy and catch their freshness from memory ; to breathe once more the aroma of the fields, and feel the sunshine playing upon her brow ; to catch a glimpse of the blue sea in the distance, with its silver-crested wavelets dancing along to break upon the golden sand.

Every Tuesday and Friday she took the productions of her garden to the market at Exeter, and her fruits and flowers were amongst the choicest there, and were speedily sold.

Thus had God, in His goodness, provided

for her, and had ordered all things with the wisest and the most beneficent views ; thus had He removed the fear that sometimes haunted her, of not being able to find the means of subsistence for her fatherless children and herself.

The pious Phœbe constantly endeavoured to make her whole life a hymn of praise to Him who had led her in a way so merciful and safe,—who had foreseen all her wants, and provided her in the season most destitute of resources, with the necessaries, and even some of the comforts, of life.

Years passed on. Industry and success went hand in hand. Family religion halloed the return of each morning and evening.

It was again May—May-day morning, nor had a lovelier day “from out the eastern chambers e’er been given.”

It was a morning in which Summer seemed to have emerged from her golden bower to see how her fair buds and blossoms were progressing.

The lark soared aloft, until her sweet carols scarcely tracked her upward flight; the pigeons, in many a giddy whirl, flew round the flowery plain; and the cuckoo's cheery voice was heard in the emerald groves.

The inhabitants of the village of H—— still did homage to the “merry month of May,” and gave one day to flowers, and sunshine and glad thoughts. They erected a tall May-pole in the centre of the village green, and festooned it with gay garlands in which fluttered ribbons whose hues melted into harmony with the flowers amongst which they were entwined.

At the foot of the May-pole stood a fairy throne, covered with moss from the breezy downs, and flowers from cool green glades, where streamlets chimed their melody of happiness amidst the reeds, and sprays of odorous hawthorn, and on it was seated the Queen of the May.

At a little distance from it stood Phœbe with her silver hair resting like purest snow upon her placid brow, and her usually pale

face flushed with pleasure as she gazed upon the merry group before her, and smiled proudly at her daughter, who sat crowned Queen of the "rosy-footed" May. But dearer and lovelier far in Phœbe's eyes than all that summer-flush of beauty was the calm sweetness of purity and piety throned upon her daughter's clear brow, and the pensive, filial earnestness of her dark eyes. Many a rustic beauty had ascended the mossy throne on the village green, to do honour to May, but never before had one mounted it lovelier or sweeter than the graceful girl who then sat crowned Queen of the fairest month of all the year. Her face was pale (the classic hue of thought) and calm, like her mother's; her nut-brown hair was parted Madonna-wise, and upon it rested a wreath of roses and lilies of the valley; her brow was like the mountain-snow, and her hazel eyes were radiant with a mild and tender light, resembling autumn sunshine. Her neck and arms were encircled with bands of moss and forget-me-nots, and her gauzy-

white dress was trimmed with garlands of moss, daisies, violets, and bunches of hawthorn blossoms—blossoms touched as tenderly as a pure ocean-shell, with faintest red melting away to pearliness.

The young men and maidens of the village formed a circle around the beautiful Queen of the May, and with smiling, happy faces, danced gaily to the music of harp and song. It was a picturesque scene, and gave an additional charm to the rural village whose inhabitants still showed that they had a taste for the beautiful, that their hearts were linked to Nature, and that they had a simple and earnest adoration for the lovely “jewels of earth’s diadem.”

Beside Phœbe on the village green stood her son Walter, who was a sailor, and was to return to his ship on the following day. He resembled his father in almost every characteristic; he had his thoughtful face, and expressive mouth, and large blue eyes dreaming meditatively beneath the expanded forehead with its light curling hair; and he was the hope and comfort of his

widowed mother. In the evening, when the festivities were nearly over, Phœbe and Walter returned to the cottage, and many friends gathered round the gate to say Good-bye to the sailor, and to wish him a safe voyage, health, and happiness. Long after they had left he stood at the cottage door, his eyes lingering lovingly on each familiar scene, as though he would fain drink in the sylvan beauty of the prospect before him, and impress it upon his mind for ever.

On the following morning, before the beams of the rising sun had crimsoned the walls of the cottage, and glittered the rose-circled windows, he said Good-bye to his mother and received her blessing, given in tremulous accents and with tearful eyes—eyes into whose azure depths he was never more to gaze.

“ Oh, linger, linger on the oar !

Oh, pause upon the deep !

That I may gaze yet once, once more,

Where floats the golden day o’er fane and steep !

Never so brightly smiled mine own sweet shore—

Oh, linger, linger on the parting oar !

Oh, linger ! linger on the oar
Beneath my native sky !
Let my life part from that bright shore
With day's last crimson—gazing let me die !
Thou barque, glide slowly ! slowly should be borne
The voyager that never shall return.

Bright isle ! might but thine echoes keep
A tone of my farewell,
One tender accent, low and deep,
Shrined midst thy streams and wooded hills to dwell !
Might my last breath send music to thy shore,—
Oh, linger, seamen ! linger on the oar ! ”



CHAPTER X.

Almost home ! The weary journey
Now will shortly ended be ;
Pain and trouble, care and sorrow,
Soon will have no power for me.
These shall pass, but peace is waiting,
Love and joy will soon be mine,
Faith is holding forth the promise,—
“Soon these treasures shall be thine.”

Jesus speaks in voice so winning,
“Almost home, my daughter, dear !”
With such precious things before me
Can I ever doubt or fear ?
So I calmly wait His message—
Wait until the time shall come,
When I shall not say I’m almost—
But am truly now—at home !

AN aged widow was sitting in a large armchair near the fire in a small room in a narrow, dull street in Exeter. Her pale face was resting on

her thin, withered hand, and her silvery hair was slightly pushed back under the snow-white cap she wore.

Beside her was a little table on which lay a large open Bible—the precious companion of many years—which she was reading intently, and which she continued to read for more than an hour.

On the table was also a flower-pot, in which was a small rose-tree with buds and beautifully-blown flowers, scenting the humble room with their sweet fragrance. It was a slip from that which grew beside the window of the cottage once the aged widow's home,—the tranquil home which stood centred amid the beauties of nature and surrounded by shady paths which led to verdant meadows, luxuriant groves, fairy dells with crystal streams, and tree-crested hills,—the calm retreat where she had hoped to end her days.

When she had finished reading the sacred page, she whispered a prayer for her absent sailor son, and looked up fondly at his photograph, placed over the mantel-

piece ; at the ocean treasures—long dark sea-weed and shells, some like Alpine snow and some with a roseate blush, as if caught from the sunset on the waters—which were arranged on the white-washed walls of the humble room. Her face was then fully revealed, and the calm, though deeply-furrowed brow, the dove-like eyes of Phœbe Lethbridge were instantly recognised.

Clouds had gathered around her since we saw her standing on the village green to see her daughter crowned Queen of the May. Firley Hall had been closed for nearly two years.

Lady Thornton had been called to join the white-robed saints above ; and Sir Edgar had gone abroad for the benefit of his health, without, however, deriving any perceptible good from the change ; and about eighteen months after leaving England his right side became paralysed, and his speech very indistinct. He appeared anxious to return home, so it was determined to remove him from Genoa as soon as

possible by way of the Mediterranean, his medical advisers thinking that as he was so fond of the sea, a voyage might tend more than anything else to restore him.

The weather was calm and delightful, and the steamer went smoothly on through the clear waters of the deep blue sea.

Sir Edgar very much enjoyed the soft breezes as he reclined on deck, and seemed to regain a little strength, and he hailed with delight the white cliffs of his native land.

For a few months after his return to Firley Hall he continued to improve in health, but suddenly a change took place, and he was again attacked with paralysis, and passed away in a gentle sleep.

The heir who succeeded Sir Edgar was a very hard, unkind man.

“There was a hardness on his cheek,
There was a hardness in his eye,”

and

“His face was keen as the wind
That cuts along the hawthorn fence.”

Nature and poverty could not touch his heart, and hence it was that Phœbe had to leave the little cottage in which she had lived for nearly twenty years, and return to Exeter, where her eldest son was settled with his family.

He was too poor to do much for his aged mother, but he did what he could, and gave her a dinner every Sunday.

Her frame was touched with the wintry frosts of age, and her working days were over. The relief which she received from the parish was very small, but this toil-worn pilgrim, by grief and poverty assailed, and dwelling all lonely in her little voiceless room—and yet, not voiceless, for from the solitude a still, small voice spoke of Heaven and Home, for bidding that lone heart to sink—never complained, but

“On scantiest means subsisting and content,”

she was ever cheerful, and greeted the kind friends who visited her with a sweet, sunny smile—the radiantly-sunny smile

that had been hers from childhood's earliest days. She sometimes heard from her daughter—whom we last saw seated on a flowery throne, and crowned Queen of the May—who was married, and had gone to settle in Australia. But it was long since she had received any communication from her sailor son. Every day she hoped to hear from him, or that he would return to gladden her heart with his presence, and she often listened with anxious ear to the Leopard-Cowry shell, in which, it is said, that the murmuring of the sea is distinctly heard, and she breathed a prayer for her absent son and blessed Him.

Phœbe Lethbridge still lives in the fair city of Exeter, and she frequently wends her solitary way to the verdant meadows and the flowery lanes where the eglantine and honeysuckle spread far and wide their blossoming branches and diffuse their rich, luscious fragrance on the summer air, and where limpid streamlets ripple over moss-clad stones, and make a sweet music that

ever accords with each mood of joy or sadness. She sometimes walks to the cemetery, and sits on her husband's and her children's grave, and gazes with tearful eyes upon the ethereal arch—the floor of that dear home where they are waiting for her and where she will shortly be.

“A few more struggles here,
A few more partings o'er,
A few more toils, a few more tears,”

and she will reach that sweet realm of love, and calm, and joy, where there is no more weariness, no oppressive weight of loneliness, no gathering cloud of sorrow, but all is joy, and melody, and peace in the presence of the All-supreme, the All-sustaining God.

And Phœbe returns to her little room in the dull street, her heart cheered with the dear hope of the everlasting spring that will soon be hers; of the fair land where she will soon, very soon, meet the dear ones who are not lost, but only gone

before ; where they will sing together the festal song of joy, and

“Where none shall bid their gladness cease,
And none their fellowship destroy.”

O happy home ! O divine abode ! where change no pathway finds, and tempests no longer sway ; where shadows are for ever passed away, and the sounds of weeping are for ever ceased.

O dear, dear home ! where the lone spirit, gathered to Heaven’s own wreath of shining ones, for ever rests in a sweet mingling of repose and love, breathed by the silent spirit of the dove through the celestial air, and where all the dear home-voices, which on earth thrilled the soul with their tones of sweet, Æolian music, blend in one grand, harmonious, never-ending song of praise around the throne of God, and of the Lamb !

The sunlight has vanished ; twilight has deepened into the mid-night hour of peace, and the aged Phœbe sinks to sleep, gazing at the hyaline firmament gemmed with

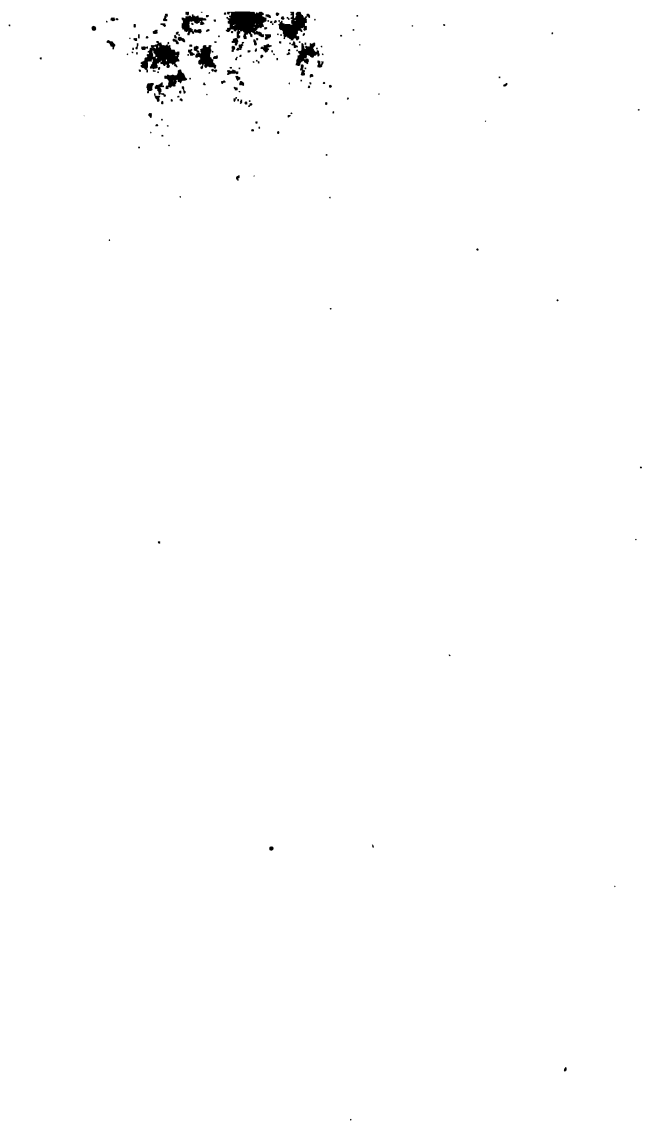
glowing orbs, and is in her dreams soaring
• to the land of light and love,—is

“ Nearer to her God in sleep,
Tasting fellowship more deep,
Entering heaven in glorious dreams,
Drinking there of living streams,
Meeting angel friends above,
Greeting them in peace and love,
Hearing songs unheard on earth,
Songs of everlasting mirth ;
Who that dream would seek to break,
Who from such a sleep would wake ! ”

THE END.















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